

# TOP WOMEN Lawyers 2021

## Laura R. Washington



**W**ashington represents clients in complex business disputes in the entertainment, media and other sectors. She's active in #MeToo movement cases and in internal investigations plus crisis response management.

For the plant-based meat-alternative company Beyond Meat, Washington leads the defense—and has cross-complained—in a suit filed by a former co-manufacturing partner after BeyondMeat terminated the agreement in 2017. *Don Lee Farms v. Beyond Meat Inc.*, BC662838 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed May 25, 2017).

"It's a challenge, because there are complex breach of contract and trade secrets issues involved," Washington said. The rupture between the former partners followed food safety incidents and a salmonella outbreak at Don Lee Farms; that business sued Beyond Meat claiming contract breaches and trade secret misappropriation.

In Washington's cross-complaint, Don Lee Farms and its parent-affiliate are accused of filing "baseless" claims and of releasing a rival plant-based product using Beyond Meat's proprietary manufacturing process.

"We substituted into the case in early 2020," Washington said. "In mid-litigation, the other side leaked confidential docu-

ments just before Beyond Meat's IPO, obviously trying to undermine it. The heart of the dispute remains that we and they worked together and it didn't work out."

Trial is scheduled to proceed after Covid-19 delays, on Sept. 27. Washington has concerns. "Will the jury be comfortable in the courtroom? Will a post-pandemic jury even care about a business dispute? I foresee that the jury pool will be difficult to evaluate. We haven't started the jury survey process yet."

As things get back to normal in the world of litigation, Washington said that clashes like that involving her Beyond Meat client are likely to slowly become routine again. "Beyond Meat is encouraging people to adopt a climate-friendly, sustainable diet. This case has been under the radar, but the very legitimacy of this business is in the mix."

In her #MeToo work, Washington said the end is in sight. Over the last 18 months, she has defeated every Weinstein Co.-related lawsuit filed against former company board member Tim Sarnoff and Miramax LLC in the U.S. "After five years, the cases are winding down, with some of them wrapped up in bankruptcy." Court backlogs remain, she added.

— John Roemer

**LATHAM & WATKINS LLP**  
CENTURY CITY

**Practice Type:**  
Litigation & Trial